

It's the little things: exploring the importance of commonplace events for early-career teachers' motivation¹

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This paper seeks to provide a rationale for further researching the everyday events that keep teachers motivated or that discourage them. We put forward the idea that routine Affect Triggering Incidents (ATIs) are an important area for researchers to investigate in terms of how they impact teacher motivation and resilience. Two groups of participants in separate consecutive studies kept weekly diaries of incidents that made them feel good or bad about themselves in their work as teachers (Study 1) and added weekly inventories of their commitment to teaching as well as measures of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Study 2). An analysis of the ATIs in these diaries revealed that student engagement and student achievement are major factors in incidents triggering regular positive feelings while students' behaviour and perceived difficulties around home influences are major factors in regular dissatisfaction. These everyday ATIs are important in the sense that they correlate significantly with measures of commitment to teaching, especially in the case of *positive* ATIs.

Keywords: emotions; affect; motivation; diary methods; self-esteem; self-efficacy; commitment to teaching

This paper examines routine, everyday occurrences in teachers' work, in an attempt to draw further attention towards commonplace events as an important site of investigation for research on teacher motivation and resilience. We examine the routine events in the situated work and professional teaching context that relate to early career individuals' experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, i.e. those that possibly influence factors such as commitment to teaching. While perceived instances of pupil success, school support and socio-economic context are crucially important to understanding teacher motivation, we argue for a more focused understanding of how 'minor' positive and negative events may/may not interact to exert influence on motivation to teach. The occurrences of frequent, 'minor' events have been conceptualised as important to motivation in general (e.g. Bandura, 1997; Lazarus, 1991), but aside from parallel work on 'stress', these events have been given little explicit attention in research on teacher motivation. Throughout this paper, we refer to commonplace events that may have an effect on teacher motivation as *Affect Triggering Incidents* (ATIs). In the review that follows we examine the notion of affect and particularly how attention has been drawn to the significance of

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frequent, routine occurrences in psychological and sociological literature. We follow this with an overview of the methodology used in our research, which focused on two groups of primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland. Our analysis leads to some points for consideration around the importance of routine events that punctuate teacher job satisfaction and motivation in early-career teachers' professional lives. Key sites flagged for future research consideration are 'the little things' that teachers derive sustenance from, even when negative events are simultaneously experienced.

Research on teacher motivation and influences on teachers

A brief glance at international teacher motivation literature suggests a strong tradition of research into macro- and meso-level factors that sustain teachers, giving only general indications of the emotional and motivational influences involved. Surveys of factors motivating people to enter teaching and of practising teachers reveal a positive picture of motives and intrinsic job satisfaction (Duke, Murdock, Bontempi, Columbus, & Kaufman, 2004; Kyriacou, Kunc, Stephens, & Hultgren, 2003; Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, & McClune, 2001; Spear, Gould, & Lee, 2000). The issue of teacher motivation and resilience is key internationally, given the high incidence of attrition from the teaching profession: In the USA up to 46% of beginning teachers leave the profession within five years of qualification (Ingersoll, 2004). While the picture from Europe is less clear and varies from country to another, there is a high level of teacher attrition among the newly qualified in many countries including the UK (OECD, 1991; Smithers, 1990; Spear et al., 2000). Among the features shown to influence attrition are demographic factors (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006), the kind of induction programme available (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) and support structures that allow for personal growth and collegial interaction (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Evidence from both Europe and the USA shows that job dissatisfaction is a major factor in an exodus of beginning teachers. Kyriacou et al. (2003) suggest there are four main reasons why teachers leave early, namely workload, salary, disruptive pupils and finally, the status of the teaching profession.

(How) do positive and negative experiences interact?

While the multiplicity of 'minor details' contributing to departure of early-career teachers are well researched (e.g. as evidenced in the literature on attrition [MacDonald, 1999], on stress and burnout [Kyriacou, 1987], and 'work stress, distress and burnout' [Hodge, Jupp, & Taylor, 1994]) the factors that sustain the stayers are often less clear. In some senses, knowing why teachers quit may signpost us to the reasons why others remain. This provides us with an important question to research: How do routine negative and positive experiences interact to characterise individuals' motivation to teach? What are the regular events in teachers' lives, which constitute the bases of motivating and sustaining their work? These questions require something different from a focus on 'critical events'; the kind of infrequent but hugely influential events that result in seismic change in teachers' thinking and motivation (Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985; Tripp, 1993). Rather our focus is on those that occur on a daily/weekly basis but whose affective overtones may, we

suggest, provide a line of sustenance to motivation. We provide a rationale for this approach below.

The importance of studying commonplace events: fluctuations in affect

Diverse areas of research involving very different methodologies (including classroom research) testify that *affect* is important for motivation and job satisfaction. We use the term 'affect' to include emotions and moods; feelings that range in intensity from mild satisfaction to joy on the positive side and from low-level irritation to extreme annoyance and depression on the negative side. Social psychological research has shown that affective changes are critical concomitants of fluctuations in feelings of self-worth (Crocker & Park, 2004). A major theme in the sociology of organisations is that affect is a critical component of job satisfaction (Brief & Weiss, 2002) and changes in judgements of self-efficacy are accompanied by raising or lowering of affect (Bandura, 1997). Of course, 'affect' is more commonly referred to in educational research in terms of 'emotions'. Affect has been shown to be a critical factor in mediating the impact of reforms and school change (Nias, 1996; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Van Veen & Laski, 2005). There is evidence that affect has a major influence in teachers' intrinsic motivation (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002) and is an important influence on students' experience of school (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). An important feature in the study of affect has been that short-term and regularly occurring events are regarded as being of greater significance than major but irregular events (Bandura, 1997). Indeed, the motivation-related experiences of teachers differ not only in affectivity and in *origin* but also in *frequency*. The significance of events for a teacher may arise not from the strength of affective reaction on any occasion, but rather because of the *recurrence* of this type of event. This is especially well illustrated in stress research; it has been shown convincingly that minor but frequent negative events (hassles) are more influential in well-being than are infrequent but major traumatic events (Chamberlain & Zika, 1990; Lazarus, 1991). Similarly, the extent to which teachers experience stress is heavily influenced by the frequency with which the event occurs (Chan, 1998).

Based on the significance of affect and the perceived need to study the frequency, causes and consequences of affective experiences at micro-level, we propose that the examination of frequent/routine *ATIs* in everyday teaching might be a valuable way to deepen our understanding of teacher motivation. We define *ATIs* as everyday incidents or occurrences, which play a major role in determining the streaming fluctuations in (teachers') affect.

Recent conceptualisations of both self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and self-esteem (Crocker & Park, 2004) regard these two concepts more in terms of dynamic states (as opposed to stable traits) that are susceptible to short- and medium-term influences. The importance of teacher efficacy has been documented for nearly two decades (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Recent developments in thinking about self-esteem emphasise the domain in which people have invested their self-worth to be of importance (Crocker & Park, 2004). Success experiences are likely to be important influences on the changes that occur to feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem; hence we hypothesise that potential correlations between the rating of *ATIs* and self-esteem and self-efficacy might be due to these routine events in teachers' lives. The UK research suggests the early years of teaching may be a phase of relatively developing or reduced sense of efficacy for teachers, while increased confidence in efficacy has

been described as a key characteristic of those between four and seven years teaching (Day et al., 2006; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007). This is important to keep in mind in terms of our participants, who had between two and five years' teaching experience in primary school classrooms (in Ireland) at the time of the study.

Context for the study

The Irish primary teaching context provides an interesting setting for the study of teacher affect, given some of the evidence available on teacher retention (particularly from OECD Reports²). Irish teachers have traditionally enjoyed a relatively high status (OECD, 1991, 2003). Even with economic prosperity of the last two decades, those entering teaching are still among the most successful of those leaving secondary (high) school (OECD, 2003). For a variety of reasons, including the strength of teacher unions and relative success in international comparative tests, teachers in Ireland may not have encountered the pressures associated with test scores and additional paperwork to the same extent as peers elsewhere, e.g. No Child Left Behind legislation in the USA or National Literacy/Numeracy strategies in the UK (Looney, 2006). This is not to suggest for a moment that education in Ireland has escaped notions of performativity and accountability; indeed what it means to teach in Ireland has changed in the past 15 years (e.g. most recently, second-level whole school evaluations being made publicly available by the Department of Education and Science in 2006). As Sugrue (2006) suggests, the mythical or 'legendary autonomy' of the Irish teacher is possibly in contention as a mid-late twentieth century backlash against church control recedes and central policy formation mimics the swift and fluid style of other western economies and education systems (Coolahan, 2004). Nonetheless, accountability and primary and secondary school restructuring regimes have had a less acute impact in Ireland despite, for example, the restructuring of third-level institutions, legislation measures (Education Act [Government of Ireland Statutes, 1998]; Education (Welfare) Act [Government of Ireland Statutes, 2000]) and development of statutory bodies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Conceptual/methodological overview of both studies

Our research design involves two consecutive studies. First, an open-ended qualitative strategy (diary methods) was used for our initial study of the construct/profile of ATIs. This is followed by a somewhat similar study with a different focus, which required the use of rating scales to measure the potential impact of ATIs, as well as other rating scales to examine their significance. In short, Study 1 is concerned with *describing ATIs*, while Study 2 attempts to *establish their importance* for teacher motivation largely in terms of *how positive and negative events interact*.

Study 1 focused on qualitative classification of the incidents that trigger feelings of positive/negative affect in the context of teachers' work. 'Diary' or 'experience sampling' methods have previously been used in work studies with police, accountants, nurses, soldiers and in the study of work-family interaction, but rather less in classroom settings (Van Eerde, Holman, & Totterdell, 2005). Diary methods may be useful 'where the aim is to measure an unobservable variable (e.g. work-related thoughts) over a fixed time frame' (Crompton & Millward Purvis, 2003, p. 205). These approaches are also deemed to be especially appropriate where there are difficulties

about reconstruction of events, especially private complex events which may be susceptible to personal interpretation and where the pace of events might be likely to make it difficult to create the constituents in retrospect. The focus of diary studies has frequently been on emotions, moods, job satisfaction, depression and feelings of intimacy (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Taking diary methods as a useful means of data gathering around routine and perhaps not-so routine events, our participants were asked to describe the incidents that had happened during the week that made them feel good (and experience satisfaction) in their work as teachers, indicate which incidents caused them to feel bad (and experience dissatisfaction). No precise indication was given to teachers regarding the number of incidents to be recorded.

Our aims in asking teachers to record these incidents were as follows:

- to attempt to describe the incidents or occurrences (ATIs) that may give rise to feelings of positive or negative affect;
- to examine the extent to which the origin of incidents giving rise to positive feelings is similar to those causing negative feelings; and
- to explore how the information giving rise to positive or negative emotion is conveyed to the teacher, e.g. does it derive from the intrinsic nature of teachers' work (e.g. observation of children's learning/behaviour, or is a third party involved [comments or principal or colleague])?

We repeated the diary format in Study 2 with a different sample of teachers, but this time it was suggested they identify *three* incidents that made them feel good about themselves as teachers and three that made them feel bad. This study examined if/how positive and negative ATIs interact with each other, i.e. do positive ATIs lessen the impact of negative incidents, and vice versa? In order to gauge this, we asked teachers to *rate the extent of satisfaction and dissatisfaction* associated with each ATI on a scale of 1–10. Using this rating of satisfaction, we might attempt to quantitatively address the relevance of the ATIs to teacher commitment. In constructing a scale to measure teachers' commitment to their work, we were influenced by the need to consider different forms of commitment; particularly the distinction between career commitment and organisational commitment (the strength of an individual's identification and involvement with a particular organisation versus their commitment to that occupation; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005). Thus, three items in a weekly diary/rating scale questionnaire form measured 'commitment to teaching' and two focused on the school level. An example of a measure of commitment to teaching was 'At the end of this week I feel that teaching is really right for me' and for commitment to the school, 'I am happy to continue working in this school'. The teachers indicated the strength of their commitment (scale 1–10) at the end of each of the five weeks. We then compare the potential effect of ATIs on teacher commitment to other non-routine daily experiences.³

If ATIs were found to be associated with an increase or decrease in commitment to teaching in Study 2, the question arises as to whether aspects of *teacher self-esteem and self-efficacy* might mediate such outcomes. The measure of teacher self-esteem was based on the conceptualisations of Crocker and Park (2004), and is a development of the work of Campbell (1990). Specifically, the descriptors chosen are based on those that might be expected to be most relevant to someone who has staked their self-esteem on their success as a teacher. The eight bi-polar adjectives were as follows: adequate/inadequate, competent/incompetent, good/bad, confident/lacking

confidence, worthwhile/worthless, organised/disorganised, secure/insecure, clear/unclear. The respondents were asked to rate their view of themselves 'at the end of this week' on a scale of 1–10, for each adjective pair. The teacher self-efficacy measure consisted of six items, gauged to measure the teachers' sense of what they could achieve in their classrooms. Examples are 'teaching all the subjects on the curriculum effectively' and 'helping children focus on learning tasks and avoid distractions'. Teachers rated their ability to carry out each one on a 10-point scale ranging from 'definitely cannot do' to 'definitely can do'.

Implementation and participants

Teachers in Study 1 were asked to complete diaries on a weekly basis over the course of three weeks. We chose a weekly interval in order to get regular information without making demands that would be impossible on beginning teachers. Our participants' open-ended diary entries were categorised, and essentially quantified, starting from a grounded theory approach. The ATIs were categorised using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and what Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to as 'open coding', 'through which the researcher names events and actions in the data and constantly compares them with one another to decide which belong together' (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005, p. 5).⁴ One concern before analysis was that learning effects would skew teachers' accounts. However, we would suggest this to be a minor concern, given the multiplicity of event types and diary characteristics (presented below), coupled with a heightened awareness of satisfying and dissatisfying events on the part of some teachers (who actually wrote to us claiming this to be the case). Given the variety of events described, we take the number of ATIs in each study as an accurate indicator that can be used in calculating correlations (see Study 2).

While diaries give us an opportunity to look at teachers' experiences in some detail, we opted to focus more on the construct of motivation as applied to routine circumstances (as opposed to focusing strongly on uniquely individual/contextualised experiences) across a larger number of teachers. We might thus perform more in-depth investigation with a smaller group in later research. A sum total of 56 teachers participated in the two studies. These teachers were drawn from a pool of graduates from our teacher education college in the past five years. Seventeen teachers participated in the first diary study in May/June 2005, of whom 16 identified as female and 1 as male. Most of the teachers were between the second and fourth year of their teaching careers.⁵ The vast majority of their schools had 11 teachers or more on staff and were mixed-sex schools. Approximately half of the participants were teaching in schools designated as serving an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The features of this group share similar characteristics to Irish early-career teachers in general, as a relatively high number of primary teachers (the majority of whom are female) enter the profession in schools that are designated disadvantaged (Morgan & O'Leary, 2004).

In the second study, the ATI construct was applied to a different population of teachers from/within the same pool of graduates. Teachers were asked to complete a diary every week for five weeks during November and December 2005. Fifty-five graduates agreed to participate in this study. Thirty-nine completed questionnaires and diaries were returned to us, while nine teachers returned the questionnaire only. Data was only used when a participant had returned both questionnaires and diaries. Only five participants identified as male. The majority (24) had between four and five years teaching experience, while 15 had between two and three years experience in

classrooms. These teachers were spread across class levels. The vast majority of participants in the second study taught in mixed-sex schools of 11 or more teachers, which were not designated as socio-economically disadvantaged by the state. It is important to point out (given the different profile of those participating in Study 2) that any comparisons drawn between the two studies are tentative. In addition, the short-term nature of both studies warrants consideration that conclusions drawn on important constructs like motivation might be further tested with a sample of teachers over a longer period in the future. It was felt at this juncture, however, that a shorter term, exploratory and in-depth focus might draw out the minutiae in order to facilitate further study.

Findings and analysis

Study 1: details and origins of ATIs

Table 1 shows the eight categories that emerged from our analysis of ATIs in Study 1, together with whether the events induced positive affect or negative affect. Of 254 events described, 153 referred to positive affect and 101 to negative affect. The three largest ATI categories refer to student engagement, behaviour and achievement and one further category is concerned with student well-being.

Student engagement mainly referred to events where students were described as participating well in lessons, bringing in materials or objects to do with previous lessons, and displaying efficient, on task behaviour during follow-up activities. For example:

While doing a series of lessons about birds, children were hugely enthusiastic and two children brought in a number of resources that related to the lessons, e.g. book, poster, CDs. (No. 40: Female, two–three years experience, teaching infants [age four–six])

On the other hand poor engagement or lack of effort was rarely referred to, but tended to include dissatisfaction over poor homework.

Student behaviour referred to times both in and out of class when teachers were pleased or displeased with particular children's, or the whole class', behaviour. Problems of student behaviour in particular covered a number of different diary entries. These included one or multiple incidences of disruptive or 'lazy' behaviour from the same child, management of disruptive or negative behaviour with other children on yard duty, and uncooperative behaviour on the part of the class as a whole.

Table 1. Sources of positive and negative affect ($n = 254$ events).

| | Category | Times mentioned* | Satisfaction | Dissatisfaction |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| A | Student engagement | 53 | 46 | 7 |
| B | Student behaviour | 49 | 17 | 32 |
| C | Student achievement | 35 | 28 | 7 |
| D | Teaching/planning/management | 29 | 13 | 16 |
| E | Home interactions and influences | 21 | 5 | 16 |
| F | Interactions with colleagues | 18 | 12 | 6 |
| G | Student personal well-being | 13 | 12 | 1 |
| H | Miscellaneous | 36 | 20 | 16 |

*Table entries are numbers of ATIs.

One child was reprimanded after continuously not doing his homework. I punished him and he said he was sorry. He then had a fight in the yard and deliberately threw another child's copy around the classroom. (Teacher 14: Female, two–three years experience, teaching infants [age four–six])

Student achievement referred primarily to the completion of tasks and tests that display pupils' proficiency or skill level in a particular topic area. This included references to 'weaker' students who made particular progress or functioned at 'average' or 'class level ability':

A child who has severe reading and writing difficulties, managed to write a page during process writing without assistance using blanks when she couldn't spell a word. (Teacher 1: Female, three–four years experience, teaching third/fourth class [age 9–10])

Teaching/planning/management referred to entries where the teacher felt that he/she had managed a lesson or activity well or poorly, refers to positive or negative outcomes from a lesson and focuses the cause of the satisfaction or dissatisfaction on him/herself rather than the pupils. This category also included constraints on teacher time and ability to deliver the curriculum and meet children's needs.

Integrated the art lesson with this [Write a Book Project] to have children design/paint a cover for their 'book'. Pleased with management of the less-than-chaotic art lesson with the quality of the work. Not happy that I'm getting to the weakest 2/3 pupils in the class – some of whose behaviour is getting more difficult to manage. Don't have the time/ideas to really target their needs and make progress. (Teacher 51: Male, two–three years teaching experience, teaching first/second class [age seven–eight])

Home interactions and influence was quite a broad category, which included positive and negative exchanges with parents. The more negative events covered a wider range of situations, including frustration over lack of support from certain parents over, e.g. homework, or, the inability of a student to concentrate 'due to' family problems.

Another parent put down phone on me on Friday, when I rang to explain (politely) that her daughter did not qualify for an Irish (language) exemption despite the parents' claims to the contrary. Most unfair that I be the target of her anger. (Teacher 1: Female, three–four years experience, teaching third/fourth class [age 9–10])

The reported events causing positive affect were clearly not a mirror image of those causing negative affect, i.e. satisfying and dissatisfying events had largely different origins. Student engagement, student achievement and student well-being were mentioned largely in the context of positive events. In contrast, student behaviour and interactions with students' homes were most frequently mentioned in relation to occasions giving rise to dissatisfaction.

Two other aspects of the results were relevant to note. Ninety-two of the positive ATIs referred to whole class experiences, while only 26 referred to individual child–teacher experiences. The vast majority (77.5%) of the 'messages' around which teachers felt good or bad were based in the intrinsic nature of teaching/classroom interaction and did not involve the mediation of a third party, which echoes Hargreaves' (2000) emphasis on the predominance of classroom relationships in teacher affect. In the remaining incidents, a variety of 'third-parties' featured particularly colleagues, and parents. There was a tendency for dissatisfying events to be somewhat more likely to have a third-party involvement. Thus, what appeared to

count most for teacher affect for these early-career teachers was class-teacher as well as student-teacher interactions. It is worth speculating that the types of events reported might be influenced by a professional culture where the *direct* intervention of other adults into the classroom remains minimal in relative terms.⁶ Indeed, a mere handful of references were made to (e.g.) principals, in any of the diary entries.

The idea that positive and negative ATIs are frequent events in these teachers' lives and have largely different origins raises a number of questions. How do positive and negative events interact with each other? Is the case, for example, that incidents giving rise to very positive feelings have an ameliorating impact on incidents that brought about negative feelings and vice versa? Or do positive and negative feelings coexist in these teachers' affective states, with little impact upon each other? A second major issue concerns how important ATIs are in their influence on participants' commitment to their work as teachers. Finally, we wished to enquire into the influence of ATIs on teacher self-esteem and self-efficacy. These questions were the main focus of Study 2.

Study 2: positive and negative interactions (39 teachers)

Despite asking for three positive and three negative events in the second sample, again rather more positive events were reported on average in each week: The mean number of positive events reported was 2.63 per week for each teachers (and 499 in total), while the corresponding number of negative events was 2.28 per week (436 in total). An analysis of negative events in the second study echoed the importance of student misbehaviour as a key affective theme for teachers. However, this time, time constraints *on teaching* was the second major source of dissatisfaction for teachers.

The following teacher (first or second class) recounted the following positive experience (as well as two others that were equally positive):

In September we did work on recycling/composting etc. On Friday we attended a talk on recycling etc. As the co-ordinators elicited their prior knowledge, they showed great understanding of the concepts and told of how they got their parents to recycle and even some to compost. It felt like the learning had been worthwhile and how teaching really can make a difference. (Teacher 10, Study 2)

However, the same teacher described the following incident that made her feel bad in the same week (as well as two other very negative ATIs):

In the staffroom a teacher made a remark how some of my past class students cannot read their readers. I feel so worried that I didn't do enough for them, was my teaching good enough? Is it good enough at the moment? Are children losing out by being in my class? (Teacher 10, Study 2)

Intensely positive and intensely negative ATIs were sourced from largely independent sources during the same week or day in Study 1 and as the example above illustrates, it became clear that incidents with positive emotional overtones did not prevent the experience of negative affect from other incidents for teachers. In short, not only positive and negative affect were independently sourced, but they were also held in constant tension with one another for our participants. We calculated the mean ratings of positive and negative ATIs and correlated these for each of the five weeks to find out whether positive ATIs ameliorated the impact of negative ones. These correlations were low and were significant in only one of the weeks, $-.21$ (n.s.), $-.41$ ($p < .05$), $.01$ (n.s.), $.08$

(n.s.) and $-.21$ (n.s.) in weeks one to five. In other words, negative events did not substantially impact on the experience of positive affective events (and vice versa).

ATIs, commitment to teaching and self-efficacy: focusing on the positive

Correlations were calculated based on the relationships between mean satisfaction and dissatisfaction weekly ratings and commitment, self-esteem and self-efficacy weekly means. Table 2 shows the correlation between teachers' commitment to teaching/school (weekly measure) and the rating of ATIs. It is clear that the rating of positive incidents correlates more strongly with commitment than negative ones. Over the five weeks, the mean correlation with commitment to teaching was $.46$ in the case of positive ATIs, but only $.31$ in the case of negative ATIs. Therefore, not only is it the case that more positive events happened/were recorded, but also *the intensity of the experience of these related more strongly with teachers' commitment to their work and school than was the case with negative events*. The implication is that for these beginning teachers' motivation, a major factor in loss of commitment is not that negative things happen, but rather the absence of positive experiences.

Table 3 shows the correlations between positive and negative ATIs and self-efficacy and self-esteem. The main point to emerge from this table is that the most consistent effect is found in the case of positive ATIs on teachers' self-efficacy. In other words,

Table 2. Correlations of commitment with ratings of positive and negative ATIs.

| | Positive ATIs | Negative ATIs |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Commitment to teaching (week 1) | $.53^{**}$ | $-.38^*$ |
| Commitment to teaching (week 2) | $.60^{**}$ | $-.46^{**}$ |
| Commitment to teaching (week 3) | $.55^{**}$ | $-.03$ |
| Commitment to teaching (week 4) | $.27$ | $.26$ |
| Commitment to teaching (week 5) | $.36^*$ | $.42^*$ |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Correlations of teacher self-efficacy and self-esteem with ratings of positive and negative ATIs.

| | Positive ATIs | Negative ATIs |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Teacher self-efficacy (week 1) | $.41^*$ | $-.17$ |
| Teacher self-efficacy (week 2) | $.32$ | $-.22$ |
| Teacher self-efficacy (week 3) | $.50^{**}$ | $-.33$ |
| Teacher self-efficacy (week 4) | $.48^{**}$ | $-.16$ |
| Teacher self-efficacy (week 5) | $.43^*$ | $-.21$ |
| | Positive ATIs | Negative ATIs |
| Teacher self-esteem (week 1) | $.35^*$ | $-.35^*$ |
| Teacher self-esteem (week 2) | $.28$ | $-.27$ |
| Teacher self-esteem (week 3) | $.40^*$ | $-.01$ |
| Teacher self-esteem (week 4) | $.28$ | $-.32$ |
| Teacher self-esteem (week 5) | $.22$ | $-.14$ |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

the strongest impact of incidents was on *teachers' sense of how effectively they could teach*, when incidents gave rise of positive feelings. In other words, the findings are parallel to those for commitment to teaching in that the effects of positive and negative incidents were not symmetrical. This finding is broadly consistent with the theoretical basis of self-efficacy in that successful efforts are regarded as the foundations of such expectations (Bandura, 1997).

The pattern of findings in the case of self-esteem is different in a number of respects. Overall the correlations are lower than in the case of commitment to teaching and teacher efficacy. Neither does the difference between positive and negative events emerge. This suggests that self-esteem may not be as susceptible to the kind of events we focused on as efficacy and commitment are. It might be the case that self-esteem may not fluctuate to the same extent.

Discussion

The studies above suggested affective reactions to routine positive and negative events happened during the same time frame, were often experienced with similar intensity, but originated largely from independent sources. Student learning and engagement in learning activities was the main source of positive experience, while factors such as student behaviour and time constraints were much more frequently framed as negative experiences. This is an interesting finding, given research in diverse areas such as neuroscience and social psychology suggesting positive and negative experiences may work as independent systems rather than, for example on a continuum of positive-negative (Davidson, Jackson, & Kalin, 2000; Goldstein & Strube, 1994; Taylor, 1991). It is interesting to note that while the importance of student engagement/pupil success was highly or frequently rated here and elsewhere (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007), workload did not appear as a primary negative theme for this particular group, somewhat unlike the themes arising from contexts with greater emphases on performativity. While in Study 2, time constraints were noted as a major source of negative affect, this may refer to an experience slightly different to the concept of 'workload' found in other studies (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007), as it possibly refers to the intensity of experience in a given time frame. Arguably both concepts can refer to a process of intensification for teachers. However, the fact that this intensity was framed in terms of constraints on *teaching time* may suggest that these teachers in the Irish context may not be experiencing the level of after-school issues (paper work, administration etc.) described in other national contexts. On another note, the first study found less than a quarter of the incidents involving students referred to individuals only. This may resonate with Hargreaves' (2000) assertion that whole class relationships are more significant to teachers than individual child relationships.

Perhaps a more interesting finding was that there was no interaction found between the intensity of feelings in Study 2; positive feelings were not lessened by negative feelings and vice versa. In addition, the average intensity of positive experiences was more strongly related to commitment to teaching than the corresponding strength of feelings arising from negative incidents. Thus it appears important to avoid a conceptualisation of routine events in motivation as a zero-sum game (i.e. which, in theory, does little to explain why teachers who might experience 'equal amounts' of positive and negative affect stay in the job). Study 2 suggested to us that positive routine events do more to enhance commitment to teaching than negative events could

impede such commitment. Such a finding may add further support to efforts to enhance teachers' job satisfaction which focus on finding sustenance in positive routine events, i.e. 'it's the little things' that count to our participants. There is a clue in the pattern of results emerging here as to why positive events are so significant. Positive events had a much stronger lifting of teachers' self-efficacy than the lowering effect of negative events. The vast literature on self-efficacy (e.g. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) has demonstrated how teacher self-efficacy has a profound effect on resilience and persistence. This may account for the strong association between positive events and commitment, demonstrated here. But again, it needs to be considered that those in Study 2 (most of whom would fall into Day et al.'s four- to seven-year teaching bracket) might be more likely to be developing increased confidence in efficacy (Day et al., 2006, 2007). Stage of experience needs to be considered as a crucial mediating factor in future research.

This tentative study may be worth considering in terms of comparing the professional well-being of these early-career teachers with peers in other countries. Despite teaching in what might be considered a relatively less intense school environment than in other countries, teachers still experienced (at times intense) negative affect. Rather than attempt to excise the negative events in a teachers' day, it may be more fruitful to look at the way that positive work-related events strengthens their interest, enhances their resilience and encourages their persistence. This may be particularly relevant to beginning teachers working in challenging circumstances (where many newly qualified teachers in Ireland begin their careers) where stressful work experiences may be 'inevitable'.⁷ Rather than simply trying to eliminate the sources of the problems, it may be more fruitful to cultivate the positive experiences that occur in these situations, e.g. teachers working to their strengths. This emphasis has been noted in other research with teachers in designated disadvantaged school settings in Ireland (Morgan & Kitching, 2007) and the UK (Day et al., 2006). Our results suggest that these early-career teachers can to certain extents live with self-doubt, failure and event hostility provided they have a mix of positive outcomes like a breakthrough with new subject matter, signs of engagement with new activities or evidence of students' motivation. What is critical is the evidence of positive events rather necessarily than the absence of negative occurrences.

Evidence from the VITAE project in the UK (Day et al., 2007) suggests teachers negotiate variously balanced interactions between professional (policy, educational ideology etc.), situated (e.g. pupil behaviour, socio-economic climate, leadership, support etc.) and personal factors (e.g. family and social roles). It should be noted that the current paper does not include reference to teachers' personal circumstances among other issues, and is therefore tentative and limited in this regard. Our emphasis on seeking the events that cause these affective experiences does not preclude the likelihood that other factors outside the classroom (like teachers' personal lives) exert an influence on the experience of affect at any given time (Brief & Weiss, 2002). In addition, we chose to focus on the construct of motivation in routine circumstances as opposed to enquiring into individual teachers' experiences in great depth. Our follow-up studies intend to use, particularly, interviews and observations with a smaller number of teachers in order to address and add greater context to the constructs examined in this paper. However, at this point we felt it important to cast a certain 'net' and use diaries in order to map particularly the simultaneous experience of routine positive and negative events in the classroom/school setting.

Conclusion

The findings described here may provide further evidence on the subjective minutiae of some early-career teachers' work through the concept of ATIs. As we have found, these may constitute an undercurrent of ongoing emotional interactions, where the turbulence of negative affect mingles with the calm of positive events. The findings suggest further the importance of intrinsic motivation as they seem to draw sustenance from their *ordinary work*. The teachers' felt good not because children were learning, but more significantly because they were engaged with the subject matter. While many were happy to receive affirmation, extrinsic recognition/reward did not seem to matter much. Perhaps our teachers' lows and highs testify that 'teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings and, at the same time, caring just as deeply that all students will have rich opportunities to learn academically challenging material that will maximize their life chances' (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 372).

These findings and further studies in this vein may have important implications for mentoring and induction programmes for newly qualified teachers. While it has been established that certain kinds of supports including mentoring, greater autonomy and administrative help have beneficial outcomes in terms of teacher retention (Guarino et al., 2006), an understanding of how motivational factors operate with newly qualified teachers could potentially greatly help efforts to retain teachers and thus enhance staff stability and cohesion. Such developed understandings could also assist the development of mentoring programmes. While the long-term significance of being a teacher may be fundamental to early-career teachers' desire to teach, it may be important not to forget the everyday 'little things'.

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Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, 7–11 April 2006.
2. There are few studies of teacher retention in the Irish context. Killeavy's (2001) study of graduates of one teacher education college found only 9.8% of the 183 graduates from 1986 had left teaching by 1996.
3. However, another forthcoming research paper (entitled 'What Makes Teachers Tick?') attempts to address the comparative effects of routine versus non-routine phenomena in a large-scale quantitative sample.
4. The focus of the coding was on the causes of the positive and negative affect. ATIs were coded and categories were iteratively cross-sectioned through axial coding, before we were finally satisfied with the constructs and major themes. The events were coded twice, separately over a period of three months in an attempt to ensure consistency in analysis. For example, 'student learning' was initially found to be quite a broad category: This category was effectively divided into 'student engagement' and 'student achievement'. Other 'student learning' entries focused more on the teacher and were redeployed to teaching/planning/management. When the same diary entry referred to a number of differing things, a qualitative decision was made on what aspect of the entry appeared to bear the greatest relationship to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction reported. While such an entry could have been placed in more than one category, the defining aspect of each entry was selected in order to categorise the ATI. A number of low frequency events could not be related to any of the major categories, and were thus categorised as 'miscellaneous' events. It is recognised as a limitation that these codes were checked and re-checked by one researcher.

5. While we wanted to involve newly qualified teachers, the demands of the first year (involving probation) are such that the additional requirements in a study of this kind would have been unreasonable.
6. Granted, this intervention may occur more obliquely in terms of the proliferation of school policies, school planning etc., yet such interventions appeared much less frequently as explicit causes for concern/motivation in teachers' accounts/perceptions.
7. This is not, of course, to suggest that the substantial literature on performativity and workload does not play a hugely significant role in terms of understanding teachers' work lives, motivations and effectiveness.

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